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SITUATION REPORTS

POLAND

The lessening of tensions in Poland following last weekend's compromise has proved short lived. Despite--or perhaps because of--the compromise, both sides have felt obliged to heed the voices of their hardline members. As a consequence an isolated local strike, despite its conclusion this morning on Solidarity's terms, has produced a new and dangerous confrontation between the regime and Solidarity.

Moderates on both sides will once again have to try climbing back from the precipice. Walesa is on the spot to make the first conciliatory move. His defiant gesture on Wednesday--a call for nationwide sit-in demonstrations--appears to have played into the hands of regime hardliners. They probably will use his threat to support their case that more forceful measures must be employed to control Solidarity.

The Mood in Moscow

The increasingly critical tone of recent Soviet public and private commentary on events in Poland strongly suggests that Moscow is preparing to confront the Kania regime over the need to assert control over Solidarity.

--Media commentary is a form of pressure on the Polish party to respond more firmly to Solidarity's escalating challenges.

--It also appears to be an attempt to lay the groundwork with foreign and domestic audiences for the future use of more forceful measures against the union by either Warsaw or Moscow, itself.

Soviet leaders probably hope their critical public stance, coupled with the behind-the-scenes pressure they undoubtedly are applying, will help Polish leaders who favor a harder line to prevail at next week's party

--continued
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155

170

NID 81

February 06, 1981

plenum. The Soviets may even try to strengthen the hand of the hardliners by more ominous statements between now and the end of the plenum on Tuesday.

Unless the plenum reasserts party control, Moscow is likely to intensify its pressure on the party to crack down on Solidarity--possibly by conducting threatening military moves as it did in early December.

Implications

Kania will be extremely reluctant to use force. His legitimacy is based on a promise to solve problems through political means. If it is a choice between ordering Polish forces to confront the Polish people or resigning, he may well choose the latter. If the Soviets cannot get Kania to move forcefully, they could attempt to bring about his ouster by shifting their support to Politburo members such as Olszowski or Moczar.

--Olszowski's recent speeches have been among the most hardline of any Polish leader, and he is reported to be the head of the Politburo faction that favors drawing the line on Solidarity's activities.

--Moczar is known as a Polish nationalist, which could make him too much of a risk for Moscow. His reputation as a strong advocate of law and order, however, could convince the Soviets, at a time of increasing unrest in Poland, to take that risk.

Moscow's desire not to mar its party congress, which begins on 23 February and will last 10 to 14 days, argues against a Soviet invasion--barring a marked deterioration of the situation in Poland--before early March. Nevertheless, the Soviets will have to be prepared to step in militarily if the Polish party attempts to repress Solidarity and the attempt backfires.